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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CA](#)  
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER HARPER'S POPULAR WIFE

11. (SBU) Summary: Laureen Harper, wife of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, plays no formal public role (unlike the U.S. First Lady), but those close to the family have described her as politically engaged and as her husband's most valuable political asset. Extroverted and friendly, she is widely credited for "softening" her more reserved husband's political image. End summary.

12. (U) Laureen Ann Harper (nee Teskey) was born on June 23, 1963, the eldest of three children, in Turner Valley, a rural community of about 1,600 residents southwest of Calgary, Alberta. Her parents, who divorced in 1991, ranched and owned an electrical contracting company. She attended Calgary's Southern Alberta Institute of Technology to study journalism and photography. She married New Zealander Neil Fenton (with whom she backpacked across Africa for six months) in 1985, but they divorced in 1988.

#### A POLITICAL ASSET

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13. (SBU) Passionate about politics since her teens, Laureen Harper joined the Reform Party (the forerunner of the Conservative Party of Canada) in the late 1980s; she met Stephen Harper at a Reform meeting in Saskatoon in 1991. They married in December 1993. Some of Stephen Harper's earliest political colleagues, including his first boss and later fellow Reform MP Deborah Grey (who introduced the couple), have credited Mrs. Harper with "mellowing" her husband, "balancing his serious side" and helping solidify his image as a family man. Described as personable, free-spirited, and with considerable personal charm, Mrs. Harper is a pro at working a room, and many observers believe her to be more at ease in front of cameras and strangers than her husband. She is also the self-confessed "mouthy one," with strong opinions on a wide variety of issues. However, Mrs. Harper reportedly made a deliberate decision not to carve out her own public role.

#### ARTISTIC INTERESTS

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14. (U) For a number of years, Mrs. Harper ran her own successful graphic design company in Calgary, but gave it up to concentrate on her family and to support her husband's political career as leader of the then-opposition Conservative Party of Canada when the family moved to Ottawa in 2002. Mrs. Harper loves animals, especially cats, and has offered her home (including the Prime Minister's residence) to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Humane Society as a foster home for kittens. In her spare time, she enjoys riding her motorcycle (a blue and white Yamaha XT22 that she bought in 2005), jewellery-making, gardening, and art. She is the Honorary Chair of the National Arts Centre (NAC) Gala Committee in Ottawa and is active with the organization.

15. (U) The Harpers have two school age children, Ben (born 1996) and Rachel (1999). Ben is an avid Toronto Maple Leafs hockey fan and plays peewee hockey. Rachel enjoys dance.

BREESE